

Little Flanders beyond Wales

A landscape archaeological research on Flemish settlement landscapes in the British Isles

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AIM OF THE RESEARCH

During the invasion of England by William the Conqueror in 1066, Flemings fought as mercenaries in the Norman armies. Little is known about the Flemings who, following the Norman-Conquest, settled in the British Isles. The only relatively well-documented community was in Pembrokeshire, South Wales, where King Henry I between 1107 and 1111 would have sent all Flemings living in England to suppress a revolt among the Welsh. Shortly after establishing the new colony, members of the Flemish lay elite immigrated directly from Flanders to plant new settlements which have striking similarities with settlements in their homeland. What impact these new immigrants had on the British settlement landscapes and which social and cultural processes were involved, is unknown. This research aims to verify the hypothesis that there has been a translocation of the Flemish planted rural settlement system to the British Isles following direct immigration from Flanders. Socioeconomic opportunism, ecological stress and demographic pressure following a wave of extension on marginal grounds along the margins of exploited lands in Flanders, caused this transfer of skills to areas equally hostile, both geographically and politically.

METHODOLOGY

Scarce previous research approached these ‘Flemish’ villages mainly from a historical and limited morphological point of view, while landscape archaeological input has been lacking for many years. This research combines multi-proxy historic, archaeological and geographical data with innovative landscape archaeological, remote-sensing and geophysical methods, in order to create a reference model for tenth- to twelfth-century Flemish planted rural settlement morphology and a Historic Landscape Characterisation for Welsh case studies. This will permit understanding of commonalities and contrast in Flemish cultural impacts on rural settlement structures and related field systems from the place of origin to dispersal to the British Isles, thereby offering insights into how culturally distinctive land-use and planning traditions were modified in response to political circumstances, local traditions and environments.

RESEARCH INFORMATION

Little Flanders beyond Wales started in November 2016 as the PhD research of Gerben Verbrugghe at Ghent University (BE). The main supervisor is Prof. Dr. Wim De Clercq (archaeology). Co-supervisors are Prof. Dr. Veerle Van Eetvelde (geography) and Prof. Dr. Steven Vanderputten (history). The research runs in close collaboration with Prof. Dr. Stephen Rippon (archaeology) from the University of Exeter (UK).

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